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ABSTRACT

Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which requires a free and appropriate education for all handicapped children in the United States, creates special problems for the language arts teacher. The law mandates that handicapped children should be mainstreamed to the maximum extent possible while receiving individualized instruction; however, language arts teachers are often untrained to deal with such students and many feel that individualized instruction should not be restricted to handicapped students. When mainstreaming is implemented, the teacher's professional rights include the following: access to complete student records, participation in all staffing sessions (with arrangements made to cover the classroom), clearly defined responsibilities as a team member, the option to refuse to accept the handicapped child into class based on existing teaching responsibilities, and released time in the teaching day to prepare individualized programs. The following procedures have proved helpful in integrating the handicapped child into the language arts classroom: the provision of special activities, the development of skill programs, the establishment of normal class expectations for the handicapped, the use of varied class organization patterns and varied instructional materials, and the development of creative activities. (DF)

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PUBLIC LAW 94-142

LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHER'S CONCERNS

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PUBLIC LAW 94-142

LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHER'S CONCERNS

PROFESSIONAL RIGHTS

Few topics have aroused more concern among language arts teachers lately than Public Law 94-142, *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*, which requires a free and appropriate education for all handicapped children in the United States. Concerns have not appeared because teachers do not support the underlying purpose of the law, providing a comprehensive diagnostic treatment for handicapped children, but rather should be viewed in the context of accountability. Since the late 1960's, parents and school officials have demanded more and more evidence of teaching competency and Public Law 94-142 changes established educational methods and procedures which add major responsibilities to the language arts teacher's work load. The most fundamental change is stated in the objective of program accessibility: *the school must take care not to isolate or concentrate handicapped persons away from non-handicapped persons.* The program developed for each handicapped child must assure that, whenever appropriate, he/she will be educated with children who are not handicapped; thus, the term *mainstreaming* has come into educational focus and is causing concern among classroom teachers. Special classes or special schools are to be provided only when the

nature of the severity of the handicap prevents satisfactory achievement in a regular class. The law does provide re-assignment when a student's handicap is disruptive to the education of the other students; however, a common sense rule of reason applies in such cases which makes it difficult for classroom teachers because children who are not classified as handicapped are sometimes disruptive to the other members of the class and there is no provision to reassign these students.

The impact of Public Law 94-142 has made fundamental changes in many facets of education. Individuals and institutions have been forced to examine their attitudes and actions toward handicapped persons. The term handicapped refers to such diseases or conditions as speech, hearing, visual and orthopedic impairments, cerebral palsy, muscular distrophy, multiple sclerosis, cancer, diabetes, mental retardation, emotional illness, and specific learning disabilities such as perceptual handicaps, dyslexia, minimal brain dsyfunctions and developmental aphasia. State and local educational districts are required to implement practical methods to locate and identify all handicapped children in need of special education and related services. The district must provide needed transportation, speech pathology and audiology, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, counseling, and medical services for diagnostic and evaluative purposes. The law is specific in defining the *rights of parents or guardians*. The parent or guardian is guaranteed due

process under the law and in consultation with team members must give approval of all program plans and evaluative procedures employed in the education of the child. Also, the parent or guardian is given the protection of confidentiality of data and information concerning the child's program and progress.

When classroom language arts teachers become aware of Public Law 94-142 and realize that the program is highly individualized, must be cooperatively developed with the parent or guardian, requires the services of a team of specialists, requires the support of the adminstration, and includes the expertize of the classroom teacher, they begin to question why these services are not provided all children. Language arts teachers realize that careful, systematic records of program and progress developed for the purpose of diagnosis, program planning, and review would certainly help all children learn more effectively. Creative, forward looking language arts teachers are responding with the attitude that Public Law 94-142 will of necessity reduce class size, provide more services for diagnosis and treatment of learning difficulties, and provide for adequate secretarial support and teacher aids because it ushers in a new era of equality for all persons, including the handicapped, in which unfair barriers to self-sufficiency and decent treatment will begin to fall before the force of the law.

If the handicapped child is placed in a regular classroom, all children may profit because it will become necessary to provide equal services to those children who are not identified as handicapped.

Until Public Law 94-142 can be adequately implemented for all children, many language arts teachers will continue to give strong support to education programs which permit handicapped children to receive highly individualized guidance in special settings. Many classroom teachers have supported special education teachers in their attempts to gain support for facilities, materials, and lower teacher-pupil ratio so that the handicapped child could receive the necessary individual attention required for successful learning. It is not suprising to find language arts teachers discussing the change in attitude and policy concerning special facilities for the handicapped learner.

Perhaps one of the more significant reasons for this change in attitude is the research evidence obtained by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) and replicated by others which identifies the concept *self-fulfilling prophecy*. The essence of this concept is that one person's prediction of another person's behavior somehow comes to be realized. Another reason is knowing when one isolates a handicapped person from the mainstream of society it is impossible for him/her to become known as a person with worthwhile skills and competences. Isolated settings result in *labelling*

which interferes with a person's ability to learn and is becomming a strong argument against standardized testing and grouping practices found in the public schools. Long's factual novel, *Johnny's Such a Bright Boy, What a Shame He's Retarded,* (1977) clearly demonstrates the negative results of *labelling* children in the educational process.

At this time, language arts teachers have many reasons to be concerned about their responsibilities and roles because they do not feel prepared to deal with handicapped students nor do they feel it a fair demand when they are expected to continue with large classes. They are concerned about taking an undue amount of class time to provide needed attention to the handicapped child when there are others in the class who should have equal time. They recognize that all children would profit from a multi-disciplinary team approach to the identification of learning problems and they are anxious about providing conference time with teams of specialists and parents when the same opportunities are not provided for all children in their class. They are quite aware that all children experience frustrations and inadequacies which if not identified and corrected can lead to failure in school. The implications of Public Law 94-142 are startling, if the language arts teacher's role is to provide educational opportunity for all the students in the class, what are his/her protection and rights under the law?

As language arts teachers become involved in the educational practices resulting from Public Law 94-142, it is necessary for them to inform others of their main responsibility, to help *all* learners develop adequate language skills through the processes of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In accepting this responsibility, the teacher is forced to consider the physical, mental, and emotional attributes of each child. Every child requires diagnostic and instructional services which enable him/her to reach effective levels of communication. When a decision is made to place a handicapped child into the regular classroom, the classroom teacher's professional rights must be honored. It is the teacher's right to be privy to all past and present records concerning each child, including the records of the child identified as handicapped. In some instances, records will reveal information which will make it obvious to the classroom teacher that he/she lacks professional preparation to deal with the problem. Also, the classroom teacher should become an involved, participating member of all staffing sessions involving the handicapped child under study. This will mean that administrative arrangements must be made to take care of the language arts teacher's regular class. As a member of the staffing team, the classroom teacher, as well as the other members, should have clearly defined responsibilities. Most staffing teams include the following persons:

TEAM MEMBERS

The Handicapped Child

Identified by the parent or guardian/community agency/school personnel

School Administrator

Implements Public Law 94-142.
Facilities the program plan as outlined by the staffing team.
Conferences with parent or guardian.

Parent or Guardian

Provides pertinent information concerning the child.
Conferences with team members, individually or in staffing sessions.
Accepts, in writing, the program plan as outlined by the staffing team, including all diagnostic and evaluative procedures.
Is assured of confidentiality and due process.

Resource Teacher or Special Education Coordinator

Outlines resources within the field of education within the district.
Conferences with parent or guardian.
Informs parents of resources within the district for the child under study.
In cooperation with other team members, writes Individual Education Program (IEP).
Arranges staffings with other team members for the purpose of program planning, evaluation, and review.
Keeps permanent record of all procedures, including record of progress for parent or guardian and other staff members.

Special Service Staff

Medical Doctor
Provides detailed medical history for child under study.

Psychiatrist
Provides appropriate psychological therapy and evaluative procedures.

Psychologist
Administers, monitors, and interprets appropriate psychological tests and therapy.

Speech Clinician
Administers appropriate hearing tests and therapy.

Audiologist
Administers appropriate hearing tests and therapy.

Optometrist

Adminsters appropriate vision tests and recommends needed remediation.

Social Worker

Interviews parent or guardian.
Provides a portrait of child's total home-community environment.

Classroom Teachers

Reviews the recommendations of the resource teacher and/or special service staff prior to accepting the child within the regular classroom setting.
Conferences with parent or guardian prior to acceptance of child under study.
Outlines resources within the classroom and school which seem appropriate for the child under study.
Prepares a schedule of classroom activities which indicate long term and short term goals for the total class.
Prepares a schedule of classroom activities which can be used in determining special support services, instructional aids, and necessary evaluative procedures required for the child under study.
Becomes an involved member of the staffing team regarding the major decisions concerning the child's program and progress, including the right to deny acceptance into the class for a part or total portion of time.
Becomes an active member in helping the handicapped child become a self-sufficient individual within the classroom, the school, and community.
Prepares and appropriate individual education program (IEP) for the child under study.
Requests instructional aids, support services, and teacher aids when appropriate for the child under study.

Staffing sessions require the development of Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and allows for the development of many different educational settings depending of the particular need of the handicapped child. Special resource rooms, public or private homes, institutions, and regular classrooms or combinations of these facilities may be used so long as

the handicapped student is educated with others in the mainstream to the maximum extent possible. The result should be to provide the education program best suited to the individual needs of the handicapped child.

In every instance, the classroom teacher should be allowed to present data concerning his teaching responsibilities, including class size, teacher-pupil ration, availability of instructional materials and support services. With this information, more intelligent decisions can be made concering the classroom teacher's decision to accept or reject the handicapped child within the regular classroom. It may be discovered, based on the facts, that the classroom teacher is within his/her *professional right* to reject the handicapped child. Under these circumstances, the classroom teacher should not be made to feel that he/she is negative toward the handicapped child or that he/she does not support an adequate educational program for handicapped children. Rather the facilities and support services should be corrected and until such action is taken, the handicapped child would be receiving a more adequate education in another setting. The administrator or staffing team should not force a handicapped child into a regular classroom when special services, instructional materials, teacher's aids, or opportunities for in-service guidance are not provided the classroom teacher. Many classroom teachers feel that they are not adequately prepared to deal with the problems of the handicapped child and until such help and guidance is given, they do not want to become responsible for the child's educational program.

When classroom teachers are assured of being involved in all staffing sessions, when their *professional rights* are considered, and when adequate support services are available they are more apt to welcome the handicapped child into their group. Language arts teachers recognize that their area of speciality, communication, offers many opportunities for handicapped children to gain effective and needed skills. Also, they accept the fact that all children need to be given opportunities to understand the problems encountered when a person overcomes physical, mental, or emotional impairments. Many language arts teachers would not find writing Individual Education Programs (IEPs) difficult; however, they would request time to prepare the programs within the teaching day. When the requirements for IEPs are examined they are found to be excellent guidelines for quality instruction. The specific content requirements of an individualized education program are as follows:

..A statement of the child's present level of educational performance.
..A statement of annual goals, including short term instructional objectives.
..A statement of the specific educational services provided.
..The extent to which the child will be able to participate in regular education programs.
..The projected date for initiation and anticipated duration of such services.
..Appropriate objective criteria, evaluation procedures, and schedules for determining, on at least an annual basis, whether instructional objectives are being achieved.

With these guildelines, it is possible for the language arts teacher to provide a variety of activities which will involve the handicapped child as he/she participates in regular classroom experiences.

When careful consideration has been given to the concerns of the language arts teacher's role and responsibilities in regard to Public Law 94-142, he/she is often willing to accept a handicapped student in the regular class. Procedures may be developed which provide a variety of listening, speaking, writing, and reading activities which given opportunity for the development of effective communication among all learners which will make possible the purpose and intent of the law. Some language arts teachers have found the following procedures helpful as they assumed the responsibilitiy of helping a handicapped person become a member of their class:

Provision for special activities designed for the handicapped person were incorporated into the lesson(s) and presented to the total class, small group, or selected individual children.

Skill programs were developed, children and parents were made aware of expectations, and diagnostic-evaluative procedures were established for the purpose of instructional planning.

Expectation for the handicapped child were the same as those established by children who met the class norm.

Class organization incorporated a variety of patterns:
e.g. small group, total group, peer, teacher-pupil, and team teaching instruction.

Many types of instructional materials were used.
e.g. printed materials, audio-visual presentations, teacher made and pupil made materials.

Creative activities were developed for the purpose of stimulating interest and thinking as well as providing enjoyment.
e.g. creative writing, creative drama, music, and dance.

When these procedures were accepted, language arts teachers found they were more effective in providing a worthwhile education program for all children; therefore, they were meeting their professional responsibility.

Language arts teachers feel that they have professional rights and responsibilities which must be taken into consideration as they become involved in Public Law 94-142 and they urge parents and adminstrators to examine practices and procedures which violate their rights because it is only in this way that all children in the United States will profit.

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